Mandala and/or *dkyil-'khor*

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This essay traces the development and the nature of two ideas that have played an important role in Buddhist thought and Buddhist experience. The one, called *mandala* (in Sanskrit), is fairly well known in Western literature, particularly because of its intricate and aesthetically moving patterning. It describes the experiencer's anthropocosmic universe. As such it is governed by the two major forms of geometry, plane and projective, with circles, squares, and triangles entering various combinations. Broadly speaking, a *mandala* presents a static worldview. By contrast, what is called *dkyil-'khor* (in Tibetan), is hardly ever mentioned in Western literature. It is a thoroughly dynamic concept that describes the anthropocosmic whole's self-organization in ever-changing and evolving patterns, ebbing and flowing, but always in some sense being the whole. In other words, a *mandala* emphasizes structure, a *dkyil-'khor* emphasizes process. The accompanying illustrations show select phases in the construction of a mandala.

OF THE two terms in the title of this essay, the first one, the Sanskrit word *mandala,* in this its Anglicized spelling, has become a generally accepted enrichment of the English language; the second one, the Tibetan word *dkyil-'khor* has remained unknown for a variety of reasons, amongst which the widespread preconception that whatever has to do with Buddhist philosophy and psychology (terms that are far from adequate to give an accurate account of what is involved by them in the Buddhist context) must be of Sanskrit origin, is the most conspicuously fallacious one. Historically speaking, Sanskrit is a latecomer in Buddhism and its eventual superseding the many vernaculars in which its teaching had been propounded, was, to a large extent, prompted by the Buddhist intelligentsia's desire to be heard by the dominant Sanskrit-speaking Brahmanical intelligentsia.

Much has been written about that which is called mandala, with plenty of mystification thrown in for good measure. Part of this mystification is due to the nondifferentiation between what is called mandala, on the one hand, and yantra, on the other hand, the one being a dynamic concept, the other being a static concept.[1] Throughout these writings about mandalas, attention is focused on the intricate and aesthetically appealing arrangement of circles, squares, and triangles, static elements of plain geometry that owe their intended tridimensional connotation and final display to the dynamics of a process of projective geometry. This process points to the anthropocosmic whole's, in psychological-experiential terms, the Self's intentionality in the sense of self-organization by way of role-playing. In other words, a mandala works from inside out, not the other way round as is so often claimed by academics and other "initiates." The late Chögyam Trungpa was therefore entirely correct when he asserted:

> It should be understood that mandala representations are not used as objects of

contemplation in an attempt to bring about certain "[altered][2] states of mind."[3]

Amazingly, none of the works dealing with what is called mandala, makes any mention of what the Buddhists, be they Indians or Tibetans, themselves had to say about how they understood or interpreted the Sanskrit word mandala. Let it be stated unequivocally that within the Tibetan cultural framework the explication of the Sanskrit word mandala continues a long-standing existential-hermeneutical tradition in which the emphasis on the Sanskrit form of this word reflects and, in a certain sense, is a concession to, the ever-hardening political climate that looked disapprovingly at its own intellectual-spiritual tradition and often suppressed it violently. When politics enters the picture, tolerance, open-mindedness, and critical thinking quickly evaporate into thin air.

To the best of my knowledge, the earliest hermeneutical interpretation of the term mandala is given by Rong-zom Chos-kyi bzang-po of the 11th century, teacher of Mar-pa do-pa chos-kyi dbang-phyug (1042-1136) and of Mar-pa lo-tsva-ba ("The Translator") chos-kyi blo-gros (1012-1097), well known in the West as the demanding teacher of the *mahasiddha* ("achiever") Tilopa who meted out his teacher's tyrannicalness on his own disciple (and eventual achiever) Naropa.[4] Rong-zom Chos-kyi bzang-po occasionally even went so far as to retranslate his Tibetan name into its Sanskrit version of Dharmabhadra. This line of interpretation continued or resurfaced with Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa Dri-med 'od-zer (1308-1363) who, however, was less India- and more Urgyan-oriented, and his contemporary 'Ba-ra-ba rGyal-mtshan dpal-bzang (1310-1391), an eminent scholar belonging to another line of *rdzogs-chen* (holistic thinking), and climaxed with 'Ju Mi-pham 'Jam-dbyangs rnam-rgyal rgya-mtsho (1846-1912), who admittedly based himself on Rong-zom Chos-kyi bzang-po's and Klong-chen rab-'byams-pa Dri-med 'od-zer's writings. It is worth noting that the above authors' interpretation of the Sanskrit word mandala occurs within the context of the lost *Guhyagarbha-tantra* (Tib. *gSang-ba snying-po*) that, in all likelihood, was introduced into Tibet from India in the wake of the growing Indianization of Tibetan Buddhism centuries after Padmasambhava's and his life-long consort mKhar-chen-bza' Ye-shes 'tsho- [alias mtsho] rgyal's[5] expulsion from Tibet proper. After their expulsion, Padmasambhava seems to have become the main proponent, if not as stated in the colophon, the author of the *dPal khrag-'thung gal-po* (Sanskritized as Sri-Heruka-tantra). This work was written by Padmasambhava on behalf of the Nepalese (ruler?) Vasudhara and the noted Tibetan scholar gNubs Sangs-rgyas ye-shes, both belonging to the 8th century.

With minor variations in diction that reflect the fact that over the centuries words had become obsolete, the exegesis of the Sanskrit word mandala is fairly uniform. 'Ju Mi-pham's presentation may serve as an overview, the gist of which can be stated with a minimum of original Tibetan terms, retained whenever necessary for precision, as follows.[6]

The term *manda* in the word mandala means an energy condensate (*snying-po*) or some elixir or essence (*bcud*) and the term *la* means to contain by capturing the possibilities inherent in the whole's energy and thus serving as the basis or reason for their existence. Taken together these two constitutive terms, manda and la, result in the idea of a globe and/or perfect circle, which is precisely what the Tibetan word *dkyil-'khor* implies. Furthermore, mandala means a principal figure surrounded by attendants. This meaning is derived from the image of a king with his retinue in his palace. Specifically, this image serves to illustrate the whole's lighting-up in its being both the founding (*rten*), the completely transparent (*yongs-su dag-pa*) quality of the whole's exquisite possibilities, and the founded (*brten*), the Self as the experiencing agent or subject-*qua*-subject.

There are a few points in this overview that need some explication. Let us begin with the image of a king with his retinue in his palace. The palace is a metaphor of any live organism's situatedness (*Befindlichkeit*), which already suggests the idea that any live organism, be it called king or Self or subject-*qua*-subject, is his/her/its world.[7] This *Befindlichkeit* allows itself to be analyzed into a founding or fundamental ground (*rten*) that is the sum total of possibilities making up what we tend to call World, the noematic in terms of modern phenomenology, and a founded (*brten*) that is the subject-*qua*-subject,

the noetic (that is as much "feelingly" appreciative as it is cognitive), as the primal condition for, if not to say, the primal initiator of the existence of the Self's objective, so-called physical-cultural world. The founding and the founded, the noematic and the feelingly appreciative noetic, are inextricably intertwined such that through them we are aware of our *Befindlichkeit* in the sense of being actively and feelingly "in touch with" all that is or comes to pass.[8]

In the reference to the founding's and the founded's "completely transparent (*yongs-su dag-pa*) quality," the emphasis is on these two co-implicates' transparent character in the immediacy of their experience that involves what is called the whole's symbolic pregnance (*ka-dag*) and the whole's thematized transparency that in its sensuously felt observability retains its symbolic character (*rnam-par dag-pa*). This symbolically transparent character (*dag*) of all that is, the noematic, experienced as the triune pattern or *dkyil-'khor* (mandala) of the whole's and, by implication, our existentiality referred to in terms of a corporeal schema (*sku*), a voicing as an announcing its presencing (*gsung*), and an intending itself as the whole's (and/or our) spirituality (*thugs*), is alike in character (*mnyam-pa*) with the noetic in its character of being alight by virtue of its being untrammeled by restrictive, defining characteristics and hence not fragmentized into mere postulates (in which, figuratively speaking, the light has gone out). This unity of the noematic and the noetic, in which it becomes well-nigh impossible to distinguish which is which, is given the code name *gzhi rang-bzhin lhun-gyis-grub-pa'i dkyil-'khor*.[9] It can best be paraphrased as "a (dynamic) energy pattern (*dkyil-'khor*) that is the whole of Being (*gzhi*) [turned into its] own most unique ability to be (*rang-bzhin*) that just is (*lhun-gyis-grub-pa*)." As 'Ju Mi-pham, furthermore, explicitly points out, this *gzhi rang-bzhin lhun-grub-kyi dkyil-'khor* is an emergent phenomenon from out of the whole's suprasensual concern (*thugs-rje*) for all that is by way of further energy patterns (*dkyil-'khor*) emerging from it in the form of peaceful and/or frightening "deities" (*zhi-khro*),[10] acting as guiding images rather than being monolithic entities. The crucial term in this code phrase is the *lhun-gyis-grub-pa* (*lhun-grub* in short) that, in its technical sense, dates back to Padmasambhava's exegesis of it to the effect that it sums up a complex phenomenon couched in the code stanza:[11]

stong gsal mdangs-lnga ldan-pa-la
lhun-grub zhes ni ming-du btags

A "translation" of this stanza in the ordinary sense of the word is impossible because the key terms that look like adjectives are more like adverbs that cannot be separated from the process they describe, for which our language is not sufficiently equipped. Furthermore, the first two "adverbs" that look like "adjectives" have to be thought together as a single "adverbial" expression. The following attempt at decoding this stanza is just an attempt and may suffice to provide an inkling of what is involved:

To (the process of) a voiding [-*cum*-] radiating
in five luminescences
The name *lhun-grub* is given.

Here, "voiding," in the sense of Alfred North Whitehead's "not allowing permanent structures to persist," refers to what is otherwise known as the "stuff" (*ngo-bo*) of which the universe (including ourselves) is made. It is neither material nor mental, and to say that it is neutral is already saying too much. The Tibetan term *ngo-bo* has a verbal character of an emerging into a presence and abiding as such. Similarly, "radiating" refers to the whole's eigenstate or own most unique ability to be (*rang-bzhin*) that each of us is; and the "five luminescences" refer to this ability's shining in a glow from deep within itself that is the whole's suprasensual concern (*thugs-rje*) in its diverse contexts known as resonance domains that together define a live person.

This "suprasensual concern" leads us back to 'Ju Mi-pham's interpretation of the first component in the word mandala: manda, explicated by him as "energy condensate" (*snying-po*) and some "elixir or essence" (*bcud*). The rendering of the single noun *snying-po* by the compound "energy condensate" is prompted by the more precise expressions presented by Rong-zom Chos-kyi bzang-po who speaks of "the energy's condensate" (*snying-po'i nying-khu*) and Vimalamitra's "spirituality's condensate" (*thugs-kyi nying-khu*).[12]

Vimalamitra's exegesis is of particular interest. In concise terms he states:

Energy (*snying-po*) encompasses all and in it all is gathered,
[This is so] because it is a condensate (*nying-khu*) of (the whole's) spirit (*thugs*).

Implied in this aphoristic statement is the Buddhist idea that the universe (including ourselves) is "intelligent," "spiritual" (whatever this may mean in a nonegological sense), and its aliveness is its energy in the form of a condensate that intimates the anthropic aspect in the cosmic aspect of the anthropocosmic whole. Process thinking could not be expressed more forcefully.

'Ju Mi-pham's second explication of manda by "elixir" in the sense of "essence" (*bcud*) is ambiguous. This term is usually used in contradistinction from *snod* meaning a "container" and specified as the founding stratum (*rten*) of all that is perishable (*'jig*), such that *bcud* is the founded (*brten*), the elixir that is the sentient beings in their container called world. By referring to the sentient beings as the founded or the "elixir" in the founding container stratum, the sentient beings who primarily are us are seen in relation to the whole's spirituality in its divine concretizations, called gods and goddesses. The emphasis on the transparent character of both the "container" and the "elixir" shows that they as fundamental images, archetypes in the terminology of the late Carl Gustav Jung, are experienced as having symbolic significance. Symbols are never arbitrarily and/or individually contrived. Rather, they are self-presentations of the whole's, in the narrower sense, the psyche's dynamics and hence do not belong to the domain of usefulness as a "mere" means to achieve a certain end (*telos*), be this a reaffirmation of some belief system or a fixation on some new figment of the imagination. As Sangs-rgyas gling-pa (1340-1396) declared:[13]

The external and the internal, the container and the elixir, are the (whole's) eigenfunction (as the intertwining of its) efficacy and apprecicativeness.

With respect to what is called a mandala in Sanskrit and a *dkyil-'khor* in Tibetan, we may anticipatingly say that it describes a dynamic (*bewegte* and *bewegende*) stillness at the center of the restless tensions around it, or, in view of the universe being "intelligent," its very abiding intelligence (*dkyil*) surrounds itself (*'khor*) with other intelligences that in their own dynamics remain inseparable from the "central" intelligence.

In a highly technical and yet poetically evocative language that spans the worldly and transworldy dimensions, Padmasamabhava says:[14]

In the radiant light (that is) the sensuously felt transparent energy pattern (into which the whole's) creativity (has constellated itself)
Within a citadel (that is the experiencer's) all-ground (as his ontic foundation), (as vast as) the sky (and a [fertile]) field,
There resides the (experiencer's) flawless meaning-structure, (expressive of the whole's) symbolic pregnance and insubstantiality.
Its limbs, the rays of [the meaning-structure's] (gracefully moving) aliveness, surround (the meaning-structure) with a halo (that is the complex schema's) disposition to become and stay alight.

Elsewhere in the same work he succinctly defines *dkyil-'khor* as meaning the following:[15]

dkyil means what is otherwise said to be *in*-formation,
'khor means unceasing aliveness.

Here and everywhere else *in*-formation (*thig-le*) does not mean a transfer of some information, but the dynamics of any system's creativity or autopoiesis, and aliveness (*rtsal*), corresponding more or less to our notion of functionality, especially when used in the compound *rtsal-rdzogs* "fully functional," carries with it the notion of gracefulness as so vividly expressed in the movements of a dancer and/or a *danseuse*.

After these introductory remarks concerning the idea of an energy pattern we may now turn to Padmasambhava's lengthy dissertation on the multiple meanings of the term *dkyil-'khor* as a starting point for coming to an understanding of this basically experiential term. His words are:[16]

First, the term *dkyil-'khor* will be explicated.
This explication involves (such topics as) the "stuff" (it is made of), its real meaning,
Its differentiations, and its appropriate metaphors.

Its differentiations involve three aspects:
A pattern that can be shown and talked about;
A pattern that is one's existential commitments and one's in-depth appraisals (of this pattern's dynamics);

A pattern that is one's own most unique ability-to-be (that as such is Being's, the whole's) spontaneously experienced presence.

Its "stuff" (comes in) three aspects:
(i) As the "stuff" that can be shown and talked about
It is a painting and/or a sculpture;
(ii) As a pattern that is one's existential commitments and one's in-depth appraisals (of this pattern's dynamics)
It is the radiance of what images in one's mind;
(iii) As a pattern that that is one's own most unique ability-to-be (that as such is Being's, the whole's) spontaneously experienced presence
It is a pattern (in which it manifests itself to us as the) sovereign (guide) through its/his unitrinity of corporeally felt presences.

(a) The supraconscious ecstatic intensity (*rig-pa*) is the *dkyil* and the originary awareness modes (*ye-shes*) are the *'khor* (and)
This is the stuff and real meaning of *chos-sku:*
(b) The principal's (*gtso-bo*) presence is the *dkyil* and the Father-Mother archetypes (*sems-dpa' yab-yum*) are the *'khor* (and)
This is the stuff and real meaning of *longs-sku*;
(c) The all-ground (*kun-gzhi*) is the *dkyil* and the eight perceptual-cognitive complexities (*tshogs-brgyad*) are the *'khor* (and)
This is the stuff and real meaning of *sprul-sku*.

The appropriate illustration (of the above triad) is the sun, the moon, and the stars.

Only a few words by way of explicating some points in this otherwise straightforward presentation will be needed. Specifically, the last two paragraphs describe and illustrate the "intelligent" and/or "spiritual" whole's closure onto itself. From its experienced sheer *in-* tensity-*cum-ex* -tensity it moves through its mythopoeic phase with the *rig-pa* having become the principal spiritual, anthropically imaged, force and the *ye-shes* having become the anthropically imaged Father-Mother archetypes, to the concrete experiencer in whom the *rig-pa* has become his spiritual ontic foundation and the *ye-shes* have turned his egological perceptual-cognitive operation. Though not stated explicitly, the implication is that the *chos-sku* is the sun, the *longs-sku* is the moon and the *sprul-sku* is the stars. A further implication is that our humanity (*chos-sku*) remains constant, our spiritual and social horizons (*longs-sku*) expand and/or contract similar to the phases of the moon, and, since each and every individual is, spiritually speaking, a *sprul-sku*, each and everyone of us is or should be a shining star and, by a further implication, a guiding image.

Still, though rather lengthy, the above overview may be seen as a kind of program notes that stand in need of further explanations. The ones, specifically relating to the *dkyil-'khor* in its multiple meanings, are offered by Padmasambhava in another lengthy hermeneutical exegesis that can be split into two parts, each of which is in itself highly revealing:[17]

A *dkyil-'khor* is said to be a *dkyil-'khor* because it means the following:
dkyil means that (what has been designated thus) has been there from all beginning before a beginning, and
'khor means that it is an unbroken (whole) and that it does not fall apart;
dkyil means the beingness of (Being's, the whole's) energy, and
'khor means the rays of its aliveness (as the anthropically conceived whole's) limbs;
dkyil means the vortex of the all-ground (as the individual's spiritual) ontic foundation, and
'khor means the (all-ground's) rays of light (as the individual's) cognitive capacity in both its "ground-state" and "ecstatic intensity."

The (unitrinity of the anthropocosmic whole's) own most unique ability-to-be, its "stuff," and suprasensual concern is (what is meant by) *dkyil*,
The three and two gates are (what is meant by) *'khor*.
The three modes of going astray are (what is meant by) *dkyil*,
The three modes of cutting off (this going astray into mistaken identifications) are (what is meant by) *'khor*.
The triad of a supraconscious ecstatic intensity, an egological mind, and an overall ("ground state") mentation is (what is meant by) *dkyil*,
(This unitrinity's) disposition to become alight (by) eradicating (its tendency to go astray) is (what is meant by) *'khor*.
The (whole's) energy as (the whole's) creativity is (what is meant by) *dkyil*,
The ultimate certainty (about it) is (what is meant by) *'khor*.
To abide as itself since its beginning before a beginning is (what is meant by) *dkyil*,
To understand its reality as having no incipience is (what is meant by) *'khor*.

The external and internal, that which lights up (as the phenomenal) and is interpreted (in the light of its probabilities) is (what is meant by) *dkyil*,
Their nonpartitioning and inseparability is (what is meant by) *'khor*.
Existence and nonexistence, coming-into-existence and ceasing-to-exist (as categories of representational thinking) is (what is meant by) *dkyil*,
Not to put them into (this thinking's rational) framework and then to calculate (what they might signify) is (what is meant by) *'khor*.
This unsurpassable *spyi-ti* teaching's energy pattern
Is far superior to (all) other energy patterns.

As will have been noted, this quote intimates the transition from the cosmic to the anthropic, the whole's closure onto itself. In it, what is cryptically referred to as the "three and two gates" intimates what is overtly called "body, speech, and mind," all three of which provide an access, a passageway, or gate to what is experientially known as *sku, gsung*, and *thugs*. The "two gates" connotate an individual's passing into samsara and nirvana, respectively. The last two lines contain a direct reference to one of Padmasambhava's own teachings, his so-called *spyi-ti* lore that proclaims the stunning discovery that energy patterns are to be found everywhere.

However, by far the most exhaustive assessment of the meaning of energy patterns and the most trenchant rebuttal of the claim that what is called an energy pattern serves a predetermined purpose, are offered in another one of Padmasambhava's own teachings, his *yang-ti* lore that is a deepening and a going-beyond his *spyi-ti* lore. The presentation, in the translation of which a few Tibetan terms have been preserved for reasons that will become clear as the discussion proceeds, runs as follows:[18]

(My) *yang-ti* lore that is an energy pattern providing a direct access into the (whole's) energy (imaged to be like) sun and moon,
Has nothing to do with realizations-achievements (*dngos-grub*) one expects (to come about).
Since this energy pattern that is one's mind in its refinement and consummate perspicacity (as) which (the whole's) creativity (has constituted itself),
Has been a radiant since its very incipience, there is no point in expecting it to become a realization-achievement.
In this energy pattern that is the dimensionality of (possible) meanings in its sensuously felt transparency of being (as vast as) the sky and (as dynamic as) a vortex,
There radiates throughout its dimension a plethora of deities (*lha-tshogs*,), (formulations of the whole's) self-originated energy.
(None) of these deities (*lha*) who, since (the whole's) emergence until now, have been something that has (or could have) been created, but are (already) complete (presences) since (the whole's) beginning before its beginning,
Needs to be invited, honored, and praised; they are perfectly complete in themselves since their (and the whole's) beginning before a beginning.
(Their) realizations-achievements are not to be expected to come from anything else or from anywhere else but the whole; they are (already) completely present in and as one's mind.

A *dkyil-'khor* [or pattern] that is made (by using some) earth-colors is a construct;
All constructed *dkyil-'khor*s break down.
Therefore, this self-originated *dkyil-'khor* that is one's mind (*sub specie aeternitatis*), (in its)
Unitrinity of its own most unique ability-to-be (*rang-bzhin*), the "stuff" (*ngo-bo*) (of which it is made), and its suprasensual concern (*thugs-rje*),
Is a primordiality, the first (and foremost) energy pattern.

Twice in this quotation a reference is made to "realizations-achievements" that in ordinary thought and parlance are said to be of some spiritual or mystical nature. This popular idea has been thoroughly reinterpreted and, from a modern perspective, demystified by Padmasambhava who, with special reference to his *spyi-ti* and *yang-ti* teachings, emphasizes the immediacy of experience as being of a higher value than the mostly acrimonious ratiocinations in which his Indian contemporaries indulged.[19]

Another point to be noted is the reference to a "plethora of deities" (*lha-tshogs*). The context that is one of sheer luminosity, already makes it quite clear that these "deities" (*lha*) are to be understood as luminous presences rather than as entities in misplaced concreteness. This means that the Tibetan term *lha*, corresponding to the Sanskrit word *deva* has retained the Sanskrit word's

original meaning of a luminous presence. The "plethora" (*tshogs*) is an allusion to the eight luminous constituents of the complex pattern called mind, the "first (and foremost) energy pattern."

The exegesis now moves into a more detailed account of the *dkyil-'khor*, only to return to the original premise of its self-originatedness and ultimately symbolic pregnance (*ka-dag*) experienced through its "closure" into the sensuously felt and seen transparency (*rnam-dag*), called World. Padmasambhava's words are:[20]

> The phenomenal (as a lighting-up) is the *dkyil-'khor* of (the whole's) corporeality (*sku*),
> Words and sounds (as resoundingness) is the *dkyil-'khor* of (the whole's) voice (*gsung*),
> Organismic and conceptualizing activities (as mentation) is the *dkyil-'khor* of (the whole's) spirit (*thugs*).
> The totality of the trichiliocosmos, (this universe of ours),
> Has been since its beginning in a beginning before a beginning, (the whole's) symbolic pregnance.
> This its self-originated utterly brilliant light
> Is a radiantly transparent, flawless *dkyil-'lhor*.
> Since this *dkyil-'khor* is thus complete in itself it need not be (purposely) generated.
> In the *dkyil-'khor* of the dimensionality of possible meanings (into which the whole's) energy (has evolved),
> The (original) energy resides as the self-originated, birthless Principal (*gtso-bo*).

What are we to make of the designation "Principal," a word that has many meanings and that we have met before? Given the geographical area from which Padmsambhava hailed and the intellectual climate in which he grew up, as well as the whole tenor of his discussion of the term *dkyil-'khor*, the prominent use of the designation "Principal" strongly resembles the notion of Spirit in the *Apocryphon of John*,[21] But Padmasambhava does not fall into the trap of the gnostics' misogynistic monotheism (despite their avowed recognition of the basically static notion of androgyny).[22] In mythopoeic language through which any lived-through experience expresses itself in the best possible way, this "principal" is given the name Kun-tu-bzang-po, "goodness *par excellence*." The quality described by this masculine noun, is not at all something purely "masculine," rather it is equally something "feminine" as intimated by this principal's name Kun-tu-bzang-mo, "goodness *par excellence,*" a feminine noun. Finally, as an argument in favor of Padmasambhava's Gnostic-Buddhist syncretistic thinking the following statement by him may be quoted:[23]

> In the *dkyil-'khor* (of the whole's) creativity (into which the whole's) energy (as an) ever-widening vortex (has constituted itself),
> There resides (this energy) as the primordial supreme deity (*lha-chen*), the first universal monarch (of the first trichiolocosmos), in its symbolic pregnance.

Apart from being a veritable associative accumulation of codes, the expression "supreme deity" in the second line of this stanza deserves special attention. In its Sanskrit form *mahādeva*, this "supreme deity" (*lha-chen*) is a clear reference to one of the principal divinities in popular Hinduism, Siva-Mahadeva. Similarly, the reference to the "first universal monarch" points in the direction of the generally accepted Indian view of the world's origin (maybe reinforced by Padmasambhava's acquaintance with gnostic ideas).[24] Lastly, the idea of "symbolic pregnance" (*ka-dag*) is definitively Padmasambhava's own.

Repeatedly, we have spoken of the whole's self-geometrization. This theme is developed by Padmasambhava in the following passage, couched in mythopoeic language:[25]

> In the *dkyil-'khor* to the East of (the whole's) brilliant light
> There resides a plethora of deities (*lha-tshogs*) (presenting the whole's) symbolic pregnance (*ka-dag*) with no obscurations (to mar its brilliance).
> In the *dkyil-'khor* to the South (of the whole's brilliant light), (the whole's) own most unique ability-to-be (*rang-bzhin*)
> There resides the self-originated darkness-gone/light-spread deity (*sangs-rgyas lha*).
> (In the *dkyil-'khor*) to the West (of the whole's brilliant light), where the (glare of the) libidinal-affective [pollutants] and the divisive-conceptual [postulates] sets,
> There resides, unbegotten since time before time, the Little Man of radiant disposition (*khye'u-chung ngang-gsal*).
> (In the *dkyil-'khor*) to the North (of the whole's brilliant light), where the eighty-four thousand divisive postulates of the intellect are cleansed,[26]

There resides the deity "dissolution of the accidentals of the intellect's divisive postulates" (*blos brtags mtshan-ma grol-ba'i lha*),
Unbegotten and utterly complete (this deity) resides (there).

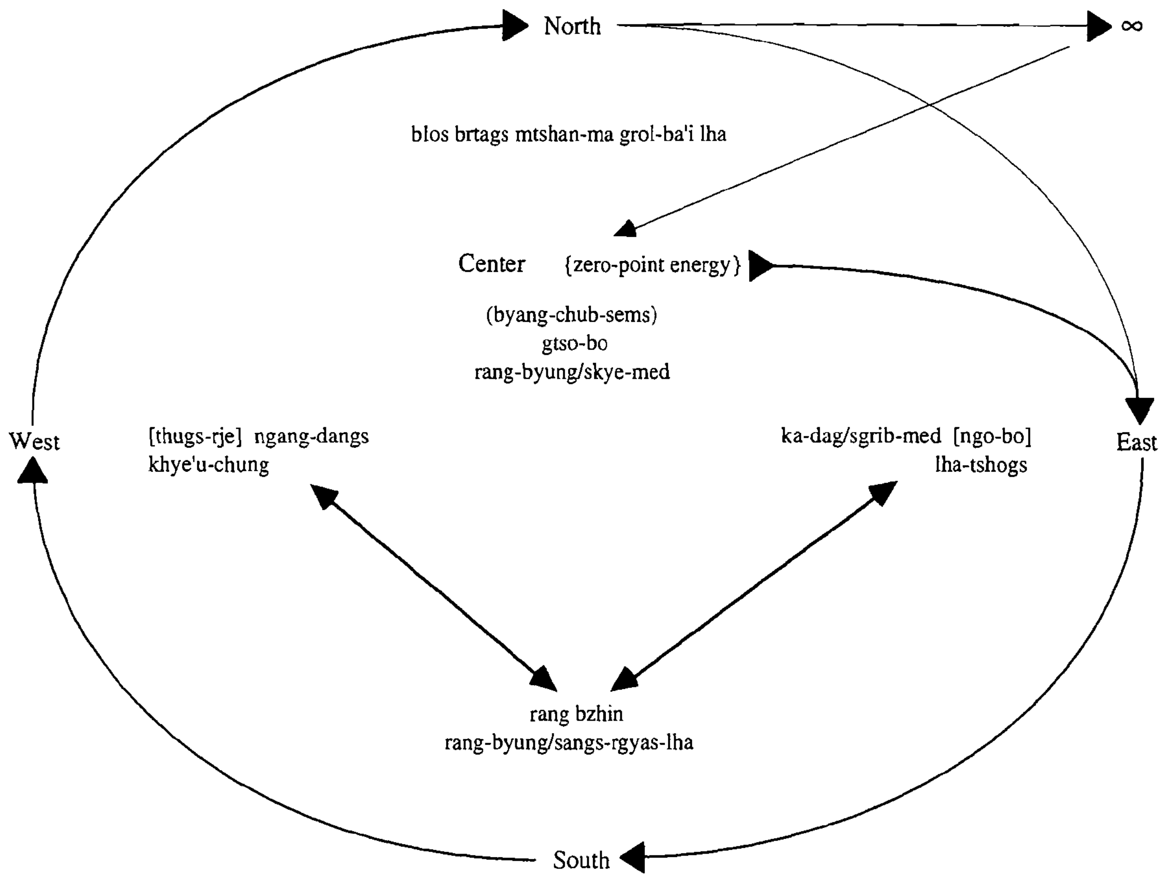
[The regents of] the five resonance domains, partly similar to each other and yet distinctly special (in their functions),
Are not ones one has laboriously searched for and then installed,
Rather, they have resided there since time before time.
Since they have resided there since time before time, one does not have to invite them (to be present during the ritual);
Since they have been pure in their transparency since their very beginning, one does not have to clean them of any blemishes;
Since they are (the expression and the expressed of the whole's) primordial symbolic pregnance, one does not have to enhance (their symbolic pregnance) by ritual acts (performed) now;
Since they have been goodness *par excellence* since time before time, one does not have to praise them (in order to have them display their goodness)
Since they are self-abiding in and as one's Self, there is no coming or going (on their part).

The message of this mythopoeic presentation of the *dkyil-'khor* 's dynamics, spanning and fusing what we divide into the cosmic and anthropic, is, from an experiental point of view, clear. There is, as it were, a bursting forth from the whole's energy a brilliant light that, like the sun rising in the East, presents itself as a plethora of luminous forces, "deities" (*lha-tshogs*) as the expression and the expressed of this primal light's symbolic pregnance (*ka-dag*) with nothing to obscure or veil its brilliance. Like the sun, moving southward and ascending to the zenith, the "stuff" (*ngo-bo*) of which the universe is made in the sense of its emerging into its full presence, the primal light that was invisible before it became visible through its own inner dynamics, now becomes its own most unique ability-to-be (*rang-bzhin*) with the consequence that we who are the whole and yet only part of it, are luminous beings. This ability-to-be's luminescence, too, is self-originating/originated and aptly called a darkness-gone/light-spread(ing) force or "deity" (*sangs-rgyas lha*). Moving to the West where the sun sets and where, by extension, the instinctual-affective-emotional vagaries and the figments of the rational mind lose their glare, the whole's ever-present intrinsic, though only too often forgotten, light assumes the image of a "Little Man of a radiatingly luminous disposition" (*khye'u-chung ngang-dangs* or *ngang-gsal*).[27] This Little Man's luminous disposition is the anthropically imaged whole's suprasensual concern (*thugs-rje*) for all that is. (The apodictive statement that this Little Man of Light or *Lichtmensch* is "unbegotten" is a key notion in gnostic thinking and its use in the above context incontrovertibly proves Padmasambhava's, in part, gnostic background.) Lastly, in the North where, for all practical purposes, the sun has disappeared and, figuratively speaking, readies itself for a new sunrise, the figments of the intellect have disappeared. There is (only) the dissolution-of-the-accidentals-of-the-intellect's-divisive-postulates force or "deity" (*blos brtags mtshan-ma grol-ba'i lha*). Figure 1 presents the above in the form of a diagram.

This "energy pattern" diagram that reflects Padmasambhava's *spyi-ti* line of experience-based and -oriented thinking, gains added significance when combined with his *yang-ti* line of thought that is even more holistic and to which he refers in the same work on fol. 129b. There he says:

The above (hermeneutically established) real meaning of *dkyil-'khor* (reverberates in)
The metaphors (that attempt to describe it to the effect that (our imaginal world's) axial mountain is the *dkyil* (and)
The four islands-continents with their sub-continents are (its) *'khor*.
The elements (that go into this world's making), stacked one upon the other, are the *dkyil* (and)
The twelve sub-continents are (its) *'khor*.
This (world system of ours) is encircled by an iron mountain.
(This system's elemental) five colors have ordered (according to the stacking of the elements) since time before time.
The four regions of the compass and the four intermediate regions as well as the four gates (of this universe imaged as a palace) have been there since time before time (such that)
In this *dkyil-'khor* (seen as) a container, the perishable world of ours,
The elixir in it is the plethora of sentient beings deities (*sems-can lha-tshogs*),
(Their) spontaneously (dynamic) own most unique ability-to-be is the plethora of *buddha* deities (*buddha'i lha-tshogs*).

Figure 1



(All this has already) been completely there
without one's laboriously searching for it
and one's validating it after having found
it.
dkyil-'khor is called *dkyil-'khor* (because)
dkyil means the vortex of (the whole's) energy,
'khor means symbolic pregnance (and)
birthlessness;
dkyil means the ground that has been there
since time before time,
'khor means the whole's) lighting-up and its
interpretation in terms of samsara and
nirvana;
dkyil means (the whole's) dimensionality of
thoughts and meanings *in statu nascendi*,
'khor means (the whole's) luminous brilliance
(*Lichthaftigkeit*) in (its) radiance-*cum*-
symbolic transparency (*gsal-dag 'od-gsal*).

An intriguing point in this quotation that reflects and restates the Indian mythological view of the universe in which we live, is, when literally translated, the expression "a plethora of deities" (*lha-tshogs*). It resembles what in the gnostic imagination is said to pertain to the upper levels of the *pleroma*. With Padmasambhava this plethora of deities is split into a plethora of sentient beings (*sems-can*) and a plethora of those who are "awake" (*buddha*). While in the term *sems-can*, denoting any sentient being, the emphasis is on what is termed *sems*, meaning "mentation" mostly in its narrower sense of ego-relatedness, so that the compound *sems-can* means "someone who is of the nature of mentation" or "someone who has a mind," the term *buddha* refers to a state of "being awake" or "having woken up" with the implied meaning of being *erlichtet* ("alight") that as a holistic designation is not the same as being "enlightened"—a logocentric misconception. From a strictly rationalistic-reductionist perspective

there is not much difference between a state of being "awake" and a state of being (merely) sentient (and more or less sleepwalking). Both qualifications are static notions that fail to do justice to a living person as a whole.

Within this *dkyil-'khor*, a gigantic patterned and patterning process, two movements are detectable. The one is a top-down movement, imaged and experienced as our *Menschwerdung*, our becoming human, whilst retaining traces of an original light that was already there before there was anything that might be called light. The other is a bottom-up movement, imaged and experienced, in gnostic terms, as an *anachoresis*, a homecoming that allows itself to be interpreted as a *return* or a *passing into* a timeless infinity without losing its finitude. The first movement is expressed in the phrase *gsal-dag rin-po-che*, the second movement is expressed in the phrase *gsal-dag 'od-gsal*. Both movements are intertwined in such a way that what is termed *rin-po-che* "preciousness" is the whole's closure onto itself as the preciousness of one's own most unique ability-to-be (*rang-bzhin*), and what is termed *'od-gsal* (literally rendered "the whole's virtual light bursting forth in brilliant radiance") is the whole's energy (*snying-po*).

While everything that captures our attention and holds it, as it were, spellbound, can be understood as a *dkyil-'khor*, there are, broadly speaking, two, or if one prefers, three major *dkyil-'khor*s. The mystery and wondrousness of which there can be nothing greater and of which we can, if at all, speak in terms of Being (Being-*qua*-being, Being-in-its-beingness, Being as such) or Man (with a capital letter in contradistinction to the paltry and rather uninspiring specimen man) is summed up in the code term *gsang-ba rmad-du byung-ba'i dkyil-'khor* that, literally rendered, means "the mysterious (*gsang-ba*) and wondrous (*rmad-du byung-ba'i*) energy pattern (*dkyil-'khor*) of which there can be none greater (*chen-po*)."[28] In the context in which this term occurs, it is almost immediately taken up by another code term, *bka' gsang rmad-du byung-ba'i dkyil-'khor* that intimates a "translation" of the "original" mystery into the mystery of language as Being's pronouncing and communicating (*bka'*) its presence to the mystery that is its transformation into Man.

This paradox of a supraordinate mystery making itself felt as two mysteries or energy patterns, is referred to by the two technical terms

rang-bzhin-gyi dkyil-'khor—eigenstate energy pattern

and

gzugs-brnyan-gyi dkyil-'khor—simile energy pattern.

Their relationship calls to mind the words of the *Chorus mysticus* in the final scene in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust* (Part II vs. 12104-12107):

> Alles Vergängliche
> Ist nur ein Gleichnis;
> Das Unzulängliche,
> Hier wird's Ereignis
> (All that is transitory
> Is but a simile;
> The unattainable,
> Here becomes one's very own).[29]

In less poetic language, the intertwining of the two energy patterns touches upon what in the field of semiotics is referred to as the inseparability of the signifier (subject) and the signified (object) in the sense that a signifier incites a signified and the signified demands a signifier, all of which presupposes a supraordinate third element, a subject-*qua*-subject or Self that is itself a *dkyil-'khor*.

Strange, or maybe not so strange, to say, this problem of the intertwining of two energy patterns has resurfaced in most modern quantum physics according to which the properties of an observed system are not possessed by it independently of interactions with an observing system. Referring to the late Nobel laureate Niels Bohr who was the first to develop this theme with considerable precision, Menas Kafatos and Robert Nadeau (1990) state:

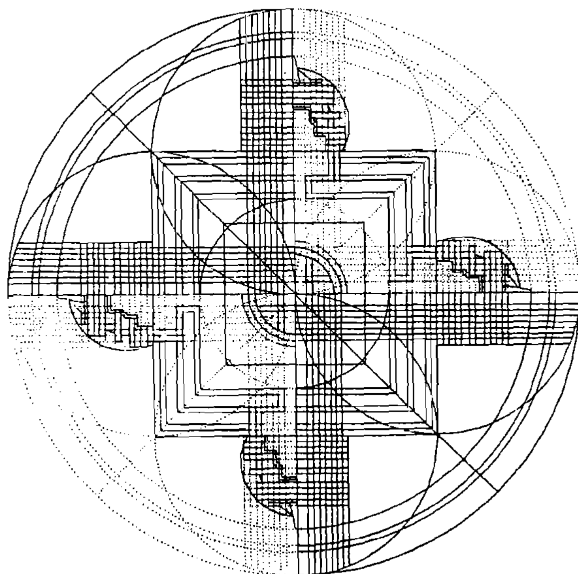
> Bohr then suggests that the "subject self" is analogous to a multivalued function of a complex variable, and the "object self" is analogous to the process of mapping that function onto a single plane of objectivity. When we attempt to describe the subject self, we are in effect, "mapping" that meaning onto the "plane"objectivity in a manner analogous to mapping the complex point onto the plane of objectivity in order to determine the value of the complex function. In both examples, we are trying to translate the subject into the object...We perpetually construct out of the

infinity of values resident in the subject self the objectified, or defined, object self. Although this object self is a function of and expresses the subject self, our maps, or descriptions, of the subject self do not and cannot contain or completely define that self. Thus any description of that which is apprehended as true for the object self is only one "objectified" expression of the subject self, and cannot be the entire description. This means, simply put, that no matter how hard we attempt to truthfully and unambiguously communicate all that we know about self, we will never arrive at precisely the same description. (p. 31)

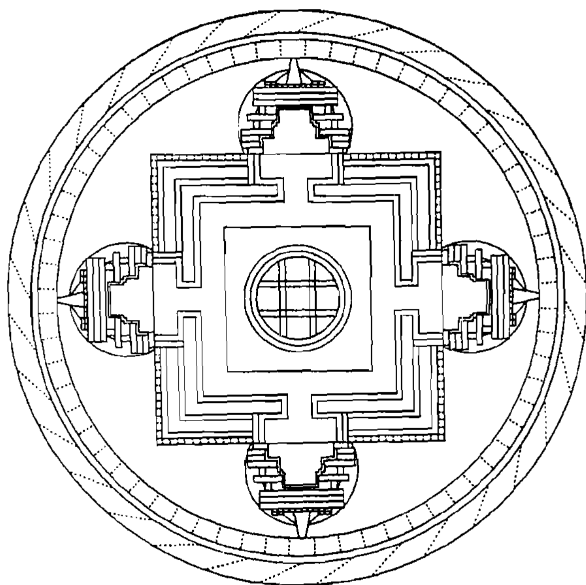
The last part in this quotation explains the enormous number of mandala paintings.

Mandala Construction Phases
(from author's collection)

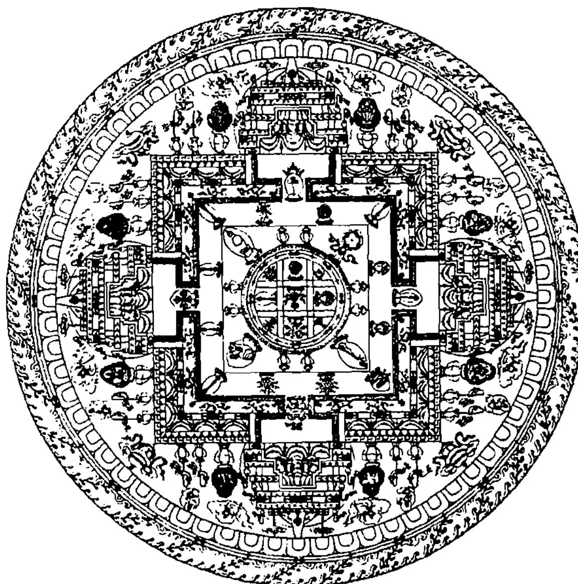
1. The Grid Plan



2. The Ground Plan



3. The Completed Plan with the Insignia of the Members of the Palatial Household



Notes

1. An excellent assessment of what is meant by yantra is provided by Khanna (1979).

2. Author's added gloss.

3. For this quotation and other pertinent critiques of rampant misconceptions, see Lopez (1998, p. 146 and, in particular, the whole of chapter five).

4. See, in particular, Guenther (1963).

5. On this liaison, see Guenther (1996, p. 2 n. 1).

6. *gSang-'grel phyogs-bcu'i mun-sel-gyi spyi-don 'od-gsal snying-po*, fol. 68b.

7. On the precise meaning of the German word *Befindlichkeit*, imaged as a mandala, a palatial mansion, a citadel, and a temple, see Guenther (1997, pp. 59ff.).

8. High credit must be given to the Buddhists' insight into the working of the complex phenomenon "mind," in which "touch" and "feeling" as judging what is touched, are primary functions. See Guenther (1976, pp. 31ff.).

9. *gSang-'grel phyogs-bcu'i mun-sel*, fol. 12a. On fol. 10b this code name is given in its condensed form of *gzhi rang-bzhin lhun-grub-kyi dkyil-'khor*.

10. Loc. cit., fol. 10b.

11. *Klong-gsal 'bar-ma nyi-ma'i gsang-rgyud*, sDe-dge ed., vol. 25, fol. 345b.

12. *Rong-zom bka'-'bum*, fol. 21ab and Vimalamitra, *rDzogs-pa-chen-po Nges-don thams-cad 'dus-pa Ye-shes nam-mkha' mnyam-pa'i rgyud*, sDe-dge ed. 2: 1-130b, fol. 75b.

Vimalamitra seems to have been a contemporary of Padmasambhava. To this day none of his works have been studied by Western scholars.

13. *Bla-ma dgongs-pa 'dus-pa*, vol. 3, p. 229.

14. *sPyi-gnad skyon-sel thig-le kun-gsal*, 2: 313a.

15. Loc. cit., fol. 315a.

16. *sPros-bral don-gsal*, 1: 66a.

17. *sGron-ma brtsegs-pa*, 3: 331a.

18. *Nyi-zla 'od-'bar mkha-klong rnam-dag rgya-mtsho klong-gsal*, 1: 129ab.

19. The relevant passages are found in his *sGron-ma brtsegs-pa'i rgyud*, 2: 332b, and *Nyi-zla 'od-'bar mkha'-klong rnam-dag rgya-mtsho klong-gsal*, 1: 128b. They are too long to be presented in the present essay.

20. *Nyi-zla 'od-'bar mkha'-klong rnam-dag rgya-mtsho klong-gsal*, 1: 129b.

21. See the long quotation from this work by Filoramo (1990, pp. 60-61). Also see the assessment of this gnostic text by Rudolph (1987, pp. 102ff. *et passim*).

22. On the disastrous implications and consequences of any form of monotheism see Shlain (1998, pp. 81, 235).

23. *Nyi-zla snying-po 'od-'bar-ba bdud-rtsi rgya-mtsho 'khyil-ba*, 3: 37a.

24. In this context consider the statement in the *Apocryphon of John* to the effect that "Nobody dominates the Spirit, for it is a monarchy (that is, it rules alone)." This quotation is taken from Filoramo (1990, p. 60).

25. *Nyi-zla 'od-'bar mkha'-klong rnam-dag rgya-mtsho klong-gsal*, 1: 129ab.

26. From a linguistic pont of view, there is, in the original Tibetan text, an inimitable play of words involved: *byang* as a noun means "North," as a verb, here used in its past tense, *'byang*, the intransitive to the transitive *sbyang* means "to get cleansed," "to become refined" as in *byang-chub* "(one's mind) in a state of refinement and consummate perspicacity."

27. For a detailed discussion of this image see Guenther (1996, s.v).

28. *dPal Khrag-'thung gal-po*, 19: 78b.

29. Author's translation. It is my contention that none of the noted English translators of Goethe's *Faust* have captured the spirit of his term *Ereignis* and/or noted this word's connection with the term *eigen* "own."

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Pigfoot



Scatman